



Media Release

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For Immediate Release
May 21, 2008

DHS PUBLISHES STUDY RESULTS ON STATE FUNDED PRE-K

Study Reveals State Investment Pays Long Term Dividends

(Little Rock--) A study of the long term effects of the Arkansas Better Chance (ABC) program has shown significant improvements in the language, literacy and math skills of children who attended ABC at age four.

The study noted that nearly 70 percent of the classrooms reviewed scored in the “good to excellent” range in overall classroom quality. This measure considers environmental factors such as activities, teacher/student interaction, and language and reasoning. Programs also netted high scores for their support of literacy skills including the use of print and fostering an interest in reading. Improving literacy is a collaborative effort between the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education through its Early Literacy Learning in Arkansas program (ELLA).

“By aligning the standards in both settings, children can transition smoothly from their pre-k situation into Kindergarten,” said Tonya Russell, Director of the Division of Child Care and Early Education for The Department of Human Services. “Developing these skills builds their interest in learning as well as their ability to learn new things.”

Assessment of the Arkansas Better Chance program is required under Act 49 of the 2nd Extraordinary Session of 2003 and is designed to follow participants in the program from Pre-K through the end of the 4th grade. The study, conducted by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University uses two methods to determine impact;

1) A sophisticated regression discontinuity design (RDD) that eliminates the threat of selection bias which arises when there are fundamental differences between eligible and non-eligible children that have huge impacts on children, such as the percent in poverty. The RDD approach finds substantial gains from ABC in entering kindergarteners. Because the RDD method cannot be applied to children after kindergarten, a second conventional formula is used to estimate later effects. Comparison of initial results between the two methods, indicates that this second method tends to underestimate the effects of ABC, however.

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DHS publishes study 2-2-2-2-2

2) A conventional longitudinal comparison of children entering kindergarten who attended an ABC program to kindergartners who were not exposed to ABC finds important learning gains through the end of first grade, the most recent measurement point. This finding holds even without adjusting for underestimation by this technique.

Authors of the study also praised programs for providing the necessary materials to support learning mathematics, but noted that, Arkansas, like other states, needs to assist teachers with techniques to help young children understand the foundational math concepts. In the fall of 2007, Arkansas launched a strategic plan to advance math instruction in the classroom. The department will also focus more on parent involvement in early education.

“The best asset we as parents can give our children is our time,” added Russell. “We need to get parents more engaged so that children see learning as a priority.”

For more information about the Arkansas Better Chance program, or to view a copy of the full report, please log on to [LongitudinaleffectsofABCprogram.doc](#), or nieer.org.

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